



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy

Floor Statement

In Support of Amendment #424 to H.R. 2810, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal

Year 2018

*July 13, 2017*

Thank you.

I am proud to co-lead this bipartisan amendment.

It would strike Section 541 of the bill, a provision that would make it nearly impossible for graduates of the military service academies to play professional football, basketball or any other sport.

I believe Section 541 will be detrimental to recruitment and morale at the service academies; could undermine efforts to bridge the military-civilian divide through the use of sports ambassadors; and could compromise the effectiveness of our officer corps.

If our amendment is successful, the policy governing the circumstances under which service academy graduates can play professional sports will be the guidance issued by Secretary Mattis earlier this year.

Pursuant to Secretary Mattis' guidance, an academy graduate must complete two years of active commissioned service before he or she can seek approval to pursue a professional sports opportunity.

Section 541 goes far beyond this existing guidance, requiring a graduate to serve five years on active duty before pursuing a professional sports opportunity. This is the functional equivalent of prohibiting a graduate from playing professional sports altogether.

Section 541 applies retroactively to current academy student-athletes, not just prospectively to future student-athletes, which strikes me as unfair. Moreover, it removes the flexibility and discretion built into Secretary Mattis' guidance, replacing it with a one-size-fits-all-policy that allows for no exceptions.

Before Congress takes such drastic action, we should carefully weigh the arguments for and against such action. That process has not taken place.

I ask my colleagues to support this amendment and to allow Secretary Mattis' guidance to remain in effect until such time as we can examine this issue more fully.

